

Bryan! Bryan! Bryan! Bryan! by Vachel Lindsay

A Rhyme in the American Language, Being Impressions of a Sixteen-Year-Old in 1896

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I.

In a nation of one hundred fine, mob-hearted, lynching,
relenting, repenting millions,
There are plenty of sweeping, swinging, stinging, gor-
geous things to shout about,
And knock your old blue devils out.

I brag and chant of Bryan, Bryan, Bryan,
Candidate for President who sketched a silver Zion,
The one American Poet who could sing outdoors.
He brought in tides of wonder, of unprecedented
splendor,
Wild roses from the plains, that made hearts tender,
All the funny circus silks
Of politics unfurled,
Bartlett pears of romance that were honey at the cores,
And torchlights down the street, to the end of the
world.

There were truths eternal in the gab and tittle-tattle.
There were real heads broken in the fustian and the
rattle.
There were real lines drawn,
Not the silver and the gold,
But Nebraska's cry went eastward against the dour
and old,
The mean and cold.

It was eighteen ninety-six, and I was just sixteen,
And Altgeld ruled in Springfield, Illinois,
When there came from the sunset Nebraska's shout of
joy:—
In a coat like a deacon, in a black Stetson hat
He scourged the elephant plutocrats
With barbed wire from the Platte.
The scales dropped from their mighty eyes,
They saw that summer's noon
A tribe of wonders coming
To a marching tune.

Oh, the long horns from Texas,
The jay hawks from Kansas,
The plop-eyed bungaroo and giant giassicus,
The varmint, chipmunk, bugaboo,
The horned toad, prairie-dog and ballyhoo,
From all the newborn States a-row,
Bidding the eagles of the west fly on,
Bidding the eagles of the west fly on,
The fawn, proactyl and thing-a-ma-jig,
The hellangone,
The whangdoodle, batfowl and pig,
The coyote, wildcat and grizzly, in a glow,
In a miracle of health and speed, the whole breed
abreast,
They leaped the Mississippi, blue border of the West,
From the Gulf to Canada, two thousand miles long,
Against the towns of Tubal Cain,
Ah, sharp was their song.
Against the ways of Tubal Cain, too cunning for the
young,
The long horn calf, the buffalo and wampus gave
tongue.

These creatures were defending things Mark Hanna
never dreamed.
The moods of airy childhood that in desert dews
gleamed,
The gossamers and whimsies,
The monkeyshines and didoes
Rank and strange
Of the cañons and the range,
The ultimate fantasies
Of the far western slope,
And of prairie schooner children
Born beneath the stars,
Beneath falling snows,
Of the babies born at midnight
In the sod butts of lost hope,
With no physician there,
Except a Kansas prayer,
With the Indian raid a-howling through the air.

And all these in their helpless days
By the dour East oppressed,
Mean Paternalism
Making their mistakes for them,
Crucifying half the west,
Till the whole eastern coast
Seemed a giant spider's nest.
And these children and their sons
At last rode through the cactus,
A cliff of mighty cowboys,
On the lope,
With gun and rope,
And all the way to frightened Maine the old East
heard them call,
And saw young Bryan by a mile lead the wall
Of men and whirling flowers and beasts,
The poet and the prophet of them all.

Prairie avenger, mountain lion,
Bryan, Bryan, Bryan, Bryan,
Gigantic troubadour, speaking like a siege gun,

Smashing Plymouth Rock with his boulders from the
West,
And just a hundred miles behind tornadoes piled
across the sky,
Blotting out sun and moon,
A sign on high.
Headlong, dazed and blinking in the weird green light,
The sealawags made moan,
Afraid to fight.

II.

When Bryan came to Springfield, and Altgeld gave
him greeting,
Rochester was deserted, Divernon was deserted,
Mechanicsburg, Riverton, Chickenbristle, Cotton Hill,
Empty—for all Sangamon drove to the meeting—
In silver-decked racing cart,
Buggy, buckboard, carryall,
Carriage, phaeton, whatever would haul,
And silver-decked farm-wagons gritted, banged and
rolled,
With the new tale of Bryan by the iron tires told.

The State House loomed afar,
A speck, a hive, a football,
A captive balloon,
And the town was all one spreading wing of hunting,
plumes and sunshine,
Every flag in town, and Bryan picture sold,
When the rigs in many a line
Reached us at noon,
And joined the wild parade against the power of gold.
We roamed, we boys from High School,
With Mankind,
While Springfield gleamed, and gleamed,
Silk-lined.
Oh, Tom Dines, and Art Fitzgerald, and the gangs
that they could get!
I can hear them yelling yet.
Helping the incantation,
Defying aristocracy,
With every bridle gone,
Bidding the eagles of the west fly on,
Bidding the eagles of the west fly on,
Ridding the world of the low down mean.
We were bully, wild and woolly,
Never yet curried below the knees,
We saw flowers in the air,
Fair as the Pleiades, bright as Orion,
The hopes of all mankind,
Made rare, resistless, thrice refined,
Oh we bucks from every Springfield ward
Were colts of democracy,
Bidding the eagles of the west fly on,
Yet time-winds out of chaos from the star-fields of
the Lord.

The long parade rolled on. I stood by my best girl.
She was a cool young citizen, with wise and laughing
eyes.

With my necktie by my ear, I was stepping on my dear.
But she kept like a pattern, without a shaken curl.

She wore in her hair a brave prairie rose.
Her gold chums cut her, for that was not the pose.
No Gibson Girl would wear it in that fresh way.
But we were fairy democrats, and this was our day.

The earth rocked like the ocean, the sidewalk was a deck.
The houses for the moment were lost in the wide wreck.
And the bands played strange and stranger music as
they trailed along.

Against the ways of Tubal Cain,
Ah, sharp was their song!
The demons in the bricks, the demons in the grass,
The demons in the bank-vaults peered out to see us
pass.

And the angels in the trees, the angels in the grass,
The angels in the flags peered out to see us pass.
And the sidewalk was our chariot and the flowers
bloomed higher,
And the street turned to silver and the grass turned
to fire,
And then it was but grass, and the town was there
again,
A place for women and men.

III.

Then we stood where we could see
Every band,
And the speaker's stand.
And Bryan took the platform,
And he was introduced.
And he lifted his hand
And cast a strange spell.
Progressive silence fell
In Springfield,
In Illinois,
Around the world.
Then we heard these glacial boulders
Across the prairie rolled:
"The people have a right
To make their own mistakes.
You shall not crucify mankind
Upon a cross of gold."
And everybody heard him

In the streets and State House yard,
And everybody heard him
In Springfield,
In Illinois,
Around and around, and around the world,
That danced upon its axis
And like a darling bronco whirled.

IV.

July, August, suspense.
Wall street lost to sense.
August, September, October,
More suspense,
And the whole East down like a wind-smashed fence.

Then Hanna to the rescue,
Hanna of Ohio,
Rallying the roller-tops,
Swivel chairs, bulls and bears,
Rallying the bucket-shops,
Threatening death,
Promising manna.
Rallying the trusts against the bawling *Bunchmouth*,
Rallying cash registers,
Invading misers' cellars,
Tin-cans, socks,
Melting down the rocks,
Pouring out the long green to a million workers,
Spindulicks by the mountain load, to stop each new
tornado,
And beat the cheapskate, blatherskite,
Populistic, anarchist,
Deacon desperado.

V.

Election night at midnight:
Boy Bryan's defeat.
Defeat of western silver,
Defeat of the wheat.
Victory of letterfiles;
And plutocrats in miles
With dollar signs upon their coats,
Diamond watchchains on their vests
And spats on their feet.
Victory of custodians,
Plymouth Rock,
And all that inbred landlord stock.
Victory of the neat,
Defeat of the aspen groves of Colorado valleys,
The blue bells of the Rockies,
And blue bonnets of old Texas,
By the Pittsburg alleys.
Defeat of alfalfa and the Mariposa lily,
Defeat of the Pacific and the long Mississippi,
Defeat of the young, by the old and silly.
Defeat of tornadoes by the poison vats supreme.
Defeat of my boyhood, defeat of my dream.

VI.

Where is McKinley, that respectable McKinley,
The man without an angle, or a tangle,
Who soothed down the city man and soothed down the
farmer,
The German, the Irish, the Southerner, the Northerner,
Who climbed every greasy pole and slipped through
every crack,
Who soothed down the bar-room, and soothed down
the church,
The devil vote, the angel vote, the neutral vote,
The desperately wicked, and their victims on the rack—
The gold vote, the silver vote, the brass vote, the
lead vote,
EVERY VOTE. . . .

Where is McKinley, Mark Hanna's McKinley,
His slave, his echo, his suit of clothes?
Gone to join the shadows with the pomps of that time,
And the flame of that summer's prairie rose.

Where is Cleveland, whom the Democratic platform
Read from the party in a glorious hour?
Gone to join the shadows with pitchfork Tillman,
And sledge-hammer Altgeld, who wrecked his power.

Where is Hanna, bulldog Hanna,
Low-browed Hanna, who said: "Stand pat"?
Gone to his own place, with Pierpont Morgan.
Gone somewhere—with lean rat Platt.

Where is Roosevelt, the young dude cowboy,
Who hated Bryan, then aped his way?
Gone to join the shadows with pious Cromwell
And tall King Sanl, till the Judgment Day.

Where is Altgeld, brave as the truth,
Whose name the few still say with tears?
Gone to join the ironies with Old John Brown,
Whose fame rings loud for a thousand years.

Where is that boy, that *Heaven-born* Bryan,
That *Homer* Bryan, who sang from the west?
Gone to join the shadows with Altgeld the Eagle,
Where the kings and the slaves and the troubadours rest.